FROM THE BOTTOM

THIS IS TUNG CHI-PING, a 24-year-old Red Chinese diplomatic official who plotted escape to the West for seven years—and finally made it last May 26 when he fled to the U. S. Embassy in Bujumbura, Burundi. The first part of an exclusive interview with him was published in the Sunday Herald Tribune. In this second part, Mr. Tung tells of life in Red China—a grinding subjugation of mind and body that determined him to find a way out.

Herald Tribune photo by BILL SAURO
Defector Tung Chi-ping

The Price of a Career in China

By Stuart H. Loory
Of The Herald Tribune Staff

As careers in a government bureaucracy go, that of Tung Chi-ping in Communist China did not get off to an auspicious start after he finished schooling at the Shanghai Foreign Language Institute.

For reasons that he himself understood fully, he was suspected by the functionaries above him. Tung Chi-ping, a crafty 24-year-old intellectual who contrived to defect safely to the United States in Africa last May, could not fool the Communist party admission officers back home in Shanghai and Peking.

"Obviously the Communist party did not consider me progressive enough," Mr. Tung told an interviewer after his arrival in New York. He related how he made repeated attempts to join the Communist Youth League—to gain a foothold on the ladder to bureaucratic success.

Today Mr. Tung maintains that he only wanted to use that ladder to work his way out from the bottom of the pyramid of government. He says, in fact, that he wanted to work his way out of China altogether. He says he grew disillusioned with the Red Chinese regime, and set his heart on defecting, as far back as 1957, when he was still a high school student in Shanghai.

Three times since 1957, he made formal application to become a member of the Communist Youth League—once in high school, once at the Shanghai Foreign Language Institute and for the last time last October, at the Commission for Cultural Exchange in Peking, where had been assigned as an interpreter.

Each time the application was denied, Mr. Tung attributes this to his failure to master the technique of "reporting your thoughts," a sort of weekly confessional the Communists have instituted for the bureaucracy.

In these reports, one is expected to confess all the anti-proletarian thoughts that went through one's mind during the week. "You were supposed to detail your own thinking and deeds for the secretary of the Youth League," Mr. Tung said.

AFRAID OF JAIL

Mr. Tung faced a serious problem. He knew that the party looked favorably upon those who really probed their inner selves, bared all their deepest feelings of error and then went on to purge themselves.

He was afraid, however, that if he really did this, the party would jail him for such "politically backward ideas."

"So, in compiling my reports," he said, "I tried to use various kinds of party jargon," he said, "but I couldn't fool them. I would write:

"'Today I heard a political report by the party secretary. But I didn't pay any attention. My political level is still very low. I still have a backward outlook. My proletarian outlook is still not firmly established' or

"'I went to a store to buy something which I really didn't need. Shoes. This shows that I am not ready to endure hardship. I still have some of the bourgeois thinking patterns.'

"I found it hard to say something sometimes for two or three weeks at a time, and the party people did not like this. . . . Those things that are unimaginable in this country were realities in China."

For eight-year-old Tung Chi-ping in 1948, reality was a one-room flat in Shanghai inhabited by his father, a clerk; his mother; three sisters and two brothers. Just before the Red Chinese takeover, the family moved to its present quarters—a three-room flat on the lower floor of a small house in Shanghai.

The flat has a kitchen; a bedroom for the parents (his father now clerks in a small watch shop and his mother stays at home) and another room for two brothers and a sister still living at home.

The oldest child, Mr. Tung's 34-year-old sister, is married to an employee of the Red Chinese foreign trading company and lives in Shanghai in separate quarters. The second sister is married to a lecturer at the Communications University—an engineering school—in Sian in Shensi Province. She also works on the university staff.

His two younger brothers are apprenticed in factories—one in a steel mill and one in a textile factory. The re-establishment of the apprentice system, which the Reds abolished in the early 1950s, has cut short the education of his brothers, Mr. Tung said.

The youngest child, Mr. Tung's 17-year-old sister, did not pass the necessary examinations on completion of junior high school and could not continue her education. She lives at home and does not work. Mr. Tung said there is considerable unemployment these days in Shanghai.

The parents' room has a bed, a table, four straight chairs, a sofa and a wardrobe. The second room has two big beds and a small table between them. The apartment has electricity but no refrigerator, radio, indoor toilet or other modern convenience.

In high school, Mr. Tung discovered he had a talent for foreign languages and he also realized this could be his vehicle for contact with the outside world. He was graduated with all the qualifications necessary to enter the Foreign Language Institute and he managed to conceal his already deep-seated antipathy to the Communist regime, simply by not discussing politics with any of his friends.

His background also qualified him for higher education: He had, he said, "a clear family background. That is, I didn't have any former landowners, rightists or counter-revolutionaries in my family. I had no relatives in Hong Kong or with any overseas Chinese."

University life was not stimulating. He studied French two hours a day for four years and devoted almost all the rest of his time "to almost daily political campaigns and activities other than study. They didn't put the regular emphasis on study."

Mr. Tung nevertheless picked up an excellent French and, at the end of the four years, when the assignments were posted on the university bulletin board, he found himself marked down for the Cultural Exchange Commission in Peking.

Most of his 26 classmates who had majored in French remained behind in Shanghai. Some were assigned to translating French medical journals, a job for which they were ill-suited, since the vocabulary they had learned was a political vocabulary. Others were sent into the banking system to teach the Chinese about French banking methods—methods the linguists did not understand themselves. Others went to work in an international bookstore, with the New China News Agency or with the broadcasting system. Some stayed behind to become instructors at the university.

In addition to French, the Institute teaches English, Spanish, Arabic, Japanese, German and Russian. Of the 200 students in his entire class, not one majored in Japanese, Spanish or Arabic, Mr. Tung said. The Arabic faculty consisted of only one instructor.

There was no ceremony and no diploma at graduation. "That's considered bourgeois," Mr. Tung said.

After graduation, he spent all of last summer at the institute undergoing one last intensive period of political indoctrination. "The party wanted 100 per cent of the graduates to declare themselves," he said.

In September, Mr. Tung, who had never before left Shanghai, took the 36-hour train ride to Peking. He walked out of the railway station and hired a pedicab to take him to the Cultural Commission.

Life there was not satisfying. His work consisted of acting as an interpreter at various international meetings—at the opening of a Center for the World Federation of Scientific Workers, at an international Buddhist Conference and the like. But Mr. Tung did get a chance to meet foreigners and improve his French.

He spent his spare time reading French. He could not get books—they were reserved only for cadremen above grade 10 and he was not yet in rank 23 of a system graded from 25 to No. 1 on top.

Fortunately, a fellow native of Shanghai ran the research department at the institute and through him Mr. Tung was able to read the French newspaper "Le Monde" regularly.

NO AMUSEMENTS

He had no social life. Dancing was permitted only on major holidays such as the Chinese new year. He would occasionally entertain friends in his dormitory room and on Sundays he went for walks with his friends after arising late and cleaning his room. The Peking tea houses are so crowded on Sundays, he said, that they could almost never find a place to sit and sip tea.

Throughout all this existence Tung Chi-ping realized that life could be something more. He saw something wrong when his teachers, encouraged to give criticism in the hundred flowers campaign, were sent off to forced labor colonies. He despised the waste of the backyard steel furnace campaign and resented the frequent interruptions in his studies for political indoctrination.

In 1957, the idea to defect came to him. He worked for his chance and won it when the Chinese, with no one more reliable to send, posted him to Brundi in Africa as an interpreter for a cultural attache who spoke no French.

Mr. Tung says the Chinese Communists will not believe his story of disillusionment.

"They think I was kidnapped," he said.

His metamorphosis from functionary at the bottom of the pyramid in Red China to some not-yet-defined role in the United States has already begun.